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### The Gay Artist as Tragic Hero in The Picture of Dorian Gray

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**Volume 11 Issue 2 (June 2009) Article 4**

**Henry M. Alley,**

**"The Gay Artist as Tragic Hero in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*"**

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**Abstract:** In his article "The Gay Artist as Tragic Hero in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" Henry M. Alley discusses the central artistic figure in Oscar Wilde's novel, Basil Hallward. As the novel's tragic protagonist, he commands the most pity and fear and serves as the most dynamic member of the *dramatis personae*. Alley contextualizes his discussion within Aristotle's *Poetics*, contemporary criticism, as well as Wilde's own comments. In addition, Alley looks at Hallward's attempt to hide or censor his gay feelings as parallel to Wilde's struggle with the various versions of the novel. Nevertheless, the characterization of Hallward celebrates the possible harmony between moral and aesthetic beauty, and, further, comes to affirm gay love, such as Wilde also saw in the lives of Shakespeare and Michelangelo. As other critics have pointed out, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* anticipates the tragic end of Oscar Wilde's own life. Nevertheless not enough stress has been placed on the sympathy elicited by the two dramas. Yet, in both the artistic tale and the biography, a gay man comes to a tragic end because of an admirable attachment to a being who nevertheless would or could not return the sacred "love that dare not speak its name."

**Henry M. ALLEY**

### **The Gay Artist as Tragic Hero in *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

In his "The Critic as Artist," Oscar Wilde writes, through his interlocutor Gilbert, of the superiority of Aristotle to Plato, since "Aristotle, like Goethe, deals with art primarily in its concrete manifestations" (67). The way art manifests itself is a primary notion of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a novel Wilde wrote virtually at the same time he developed his philosophical dialogue. Aristotle, and particularly his *Poetics*, serve as a key to understanding the novel's plot and principal characters. When "The Critic as Artist" establishes Aristotle as a "physiologist and psychologist" (67), whose work is quite distinct from Plato's "metaphysical sphere of abstract being," Wilde is drawing on, of course, an intense philosophical contrast, extending all the way back to the fourth century B.C., as summed up in Raphael's *School of Athens*, where Plato is pointing up to the heavens and Aristotle is pointing down to earth. Aristotle is the philosopher of the manifested world, not only in the arts but also the sciences. Aristotle's links to the corporeal world might be best summed in the following passage:

The scanty conceptions to which we can attain of celestial things give us, from their excellence, more pleasure than all our knowledge of the world in which we live; just as a half glimpse of persons that we love is more delightful than an accurate view of other things, whatever their number and dimensions. On the other hand, in certitude and in completeness our knowledge of terrestrial things has the advantage. Moreover, their greater nearness and affinity to us balances somewhat the loftier interest of the heavenly things that are the objects of the higher philosophy. Having already treated of the celestial world, as far as our conjectures would reach we proceed to treat of animals, without omitting, to the best of our ability, any member of the kingdom, however ignoble. For if some have no graces to charm the sense, yet nature, which fashioned them, gives amazing pleasure in their study to all who can trace links of causation, and are inclined to philosophy. Indeed, it would be strange if mimic representations of them were attractive, because they disclose the mimetic skill of the painter or sculptor, and the original realities themselves were not more interesting, to all at any rate who have eyes to discern the causes. We therefore must not recoil with childish aversion from the examination of the humbler animals. Every realm of nature is marvelous. (1004)

It is exactly here in the "here below" (*Parts of Animals* 99) of the earthly realm that Basil Hallward, the principal hero of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, finds his tragic struggle: the manifested world is a theatre of continuously questionable attractions for him. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, in compressing, poeticizing, and freely adapting the text from *Parts of the Animals*, has Aristotle say: "We take pleasure in the beauty of a statue, shall not then the living fill us with delight?" (156). This near mistranslation -- which, in fact, via quotation in Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way to Western Civilization*, has made its way into mainstream thought -- actually pinpoints the center of Basil's struggle. He cannot make up his mind as to whether he should experience life, being caught up as he is in the perfected world of art. Taking as her epigraph an excerpt of Thompson's already compressed translation, the contemporary poet, Patricia Hopper writes in her poem, "Aristotle's Garden," a statement particularly apt for Hallward: "No matter how much desire/you had in one direction -- / cabbage or caterpillar -- / it might not be enough" (16). Driven forward by his desire to consummate his love for Dorian, Hallward, in an equal and opposite way, pulls back, put off by the creatures which "are subject to generation and decay" (1003). This "aversion" is linked intimately to his inner homophobia and is boldly connected to his status as a tragic hero.

The issue of sexuality, and by extension, the threat and challenges of the manifested world, has been a puzzle to many general readers and also to critics and scholars of the novel, but we can gain greater clarity on one of Wilde's major subjects if we focus on Hallward's dilemma via Aristotle's *Poetics*. This treatise Wilde wrote about in his "The Critic as Artist" as concerned primarily with "energy" (67) and the various ways a protagonist can fail at demonstrating it. Let us consider, for a moment, seeing Hallward as the centerpiece of the *dramatis personae*, a gifted artist, a man "from the highly renowned and prosperous" (Cooper 40), who, because of some error, that is, a self-protecting fixation on male beauty, came to a bad end. Contrary to many interpretations, his gayness comprises some of the grandeur of his personality, a valuable endowment which emphasizes his capacity for creative admiration. Very much like Romeo and Juliet, he loves naively and extravagantly, in a way that elicits

pity and fear. And we could no more say that the gay nature of his attractions is at fault than we could say that heterosexuality is the fault of Shakespeare's celebrated pair. Within this particular frame, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an impassioned affirmation of homoerotic love and its healthy potential, since such love comprises the interior theatre for a compelling tragic drama, giving new meaning to Wilde's statement, "Hallward is what I think I am" (Wilde qtd. in Hart-Davis 116). In *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment*, Alan Sinfield writes that "Hallward comes closest to same-sex passion and is an artist, so we have one correlate in the Wildean queer image" (101).

Two scholars who push Hallward to the back of the drama, however, Jeffrey Meyers and Sheldon W. Liebman, sum up the more pejorative treatment of this major character. Meyers writes, "The kindly and optimistic Hallward seems to come closest to the ideal of the novel ... But Hallward is killed by Dorian, whose descent into the 'vulgar profligacy' that dulls the senses and into the suicide that extinguishes them is the antithesis of the ideal that Wilde is trying to express through Hallward" (21). Similarly, almost twenty years later, Liebman writes, "The moral order that Basil believes in does not exist. At the end of *Dorian Gray*, the stage is strewn with the bodies of the innocent" (305). However, as we see over and over again in Shakespeare and in the theory of tragedy by Aristotle, death does not disqualify necessarily a character as a moral constant, the yardstick by which others are measured, nor does the death of the innocent necessarily abnegate a moral order. Certainly, the example of Cordelia comes to mind, and she is particularly apt an example since her sexual vitality and benevolence serve to develop the very life of the play, even while her potential is destroyed. Her tragic death, like Hallward's, points to an alternative world, where truth and honor prevail, while also accentuating the degeneracy of the present social system which corrupts what is right and good. As at the end of *King Lear*, the cosmic design is present and indicated; it just does not necessarily prevail.

The large amount of contemporary commentary accumulated around Aristotle's *Poetics* provides us with a new way of linking early modern, modern, and post-modern characters with one another, and giving us a fresh perspective on both Aristotle's uniquely helpful treatise. In her essay, "The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy," Amelie Rorty points out that "waywardness" is a better translation of *hamartia* than "tragic flaw" and that "the tragic hero's *hamartia* is an accident of his excellence: his purposes and energy make him susceptible to a kind of waywardness that arises from his character" (11). Hallward, gifted in his own way, with his sensitive gayness and artistic talent, steps forward, Cordelia-like, to speak the honest expression which launches the whole narrative. His gift, resulting in his ambivalent fixation on Dorian, will also be his undoing. Like Cordelia, Hallward is associated with nature from the very beginning of the story at hand. In Chapter One Hallward's garden is richly described with such details as "the sullen murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine" (7) and "the honey-sweet and honey-colored blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs" (7). As a wayward, talented artist, wanting to enter the world of experience, Hallward is associated with vitality and the senses, and this landscape is a prelude to his first confession of his attraction to Dorian, a confession which is framed by the natural scene: "A grasshopper began to chirrup by the wall, and like a blue thread a long dragon-fly floated past on its brown gauze wings. Lord Henry felt as if he could hear Basil Hallward's heart beating, and wondered what was coming" (11). Indeed, in the description that follows, Hallward refers to Dorian absorbing his "whole nature" (11). Although, in Oscar Wilde's own life, Hallward's confession, as it appears in the 1890 version of the story, will be read into the court record of the First Trial as evidence of Wilde's power to corrupt, what Hallward says of his artistic but sensual bonding with his protégé reads as an archetype of unadulterated gay love. This fact is borne out by his refusal to display Dorian's portrait because it might reveal who he, Hallward, is: "There is too much of myself in the thing" (15) -- and "the world might guess it; and I will not reveal my soul to their shallow, prying eyes" (15). Wilde creates, in the image of Hallward contemplating his object of love, something unspoiled, that is, a young, handsome gay artist, who, with his "rugged strong face and ... coal-black hair" (9), rivets on "this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves" (9). One might even call this "the immortal cruise" from Hallward from across a crowded room. In the original manuscript, Wilde gives Hallward's confession the closing words, "I would never leave him till either he or I were dead" (117). Jeffrey Nunokawa pictures Hallward here as "the hero of the coming-out story" (185), and although Nunokawa emphasizes the

self-repudiation of Hallward's later "distinction between art and autobiography" (185), nevertheless the painter's perception of his own inner revelation cannot be denied.

Although Meyers writes that the novel "is really about the jealousy and pain, the fear and guilt of being a homosexual" (20), the problem is not with homosexuality itself. As a gay man, Hallward is moral, gifted, and considerate. In the discussion of Chapter Six, where the "good" is discussed, Hallward, while not resisting Lord Henry's principle of "self-development," also espouses a balancing sense of being linked to the rest of the world: "But, surely, if one lives merely for one's self ... one pays a terrible price for doing so?" (64). In this, he is linked with the web of life, such as was advanced by such nineteenth-century novelists as Leo Tolstoy and George Eliot, a context he affirms when he defends Sybil Vane despite her inept acting performance: "Don't talk like that about any one you love, Dorian. Love is a more wonderful thing than Art" (68). Liebman admits that "Basil allows himself not only to identify with others and sympathize with both their suffering and aspirations, but to feel in general" (304). Hallward in fact so sympathizes with his fellow creatures, he is willing to place them above the very thing that is the center of his existence. Dorian is fully aware of Hallward's ability to save him through his goodness and his gay love. For as the portrait begins to show its first signs of corruption after Sybil Vane commits suicide, Dorian considers that "Basil would have helped him to resist Lord Henry's influence, and the still more poisonous influences that came from his own temperament. The love that he [Hallward] bore him -- for it was really love -- had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself" (93). One may note that while the various historical giants referred to are indeed noble, are creators of what is enduring, they could hardly be called non-sensual. Michelangelo had his massive male bodies reproduced in stone and on frescoes. He, along with the other three, were, at least in Wilde's mind, practicing homosexuals (93). Through Dorian's contemplation -- and it is an interesting complement to Hallward's idolatry -- Hallward joins a distinguished, passionate un-apologizing company, anticipating Wilde's own vehement defense of "the love that dare not speak its name" as typifying not only Shakespeare, but Plato and "the basis of his philosophy" (Hyde 201). We have, then, more than midway through the novel, a carefully wrought portrait of what a contemporary, healthy gay love might be, both sensual and spiritual in nature. In view of this artistic ideal, Wilde's artist-lover Hallward is the major player, and the perfect forerunner of D.H. Lawrence's Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich.

Like these two early twentieth century embodiments of fierce brotherhood and homoeroticism, however, Hallward finds his tragedy in his inability to bring his love into the context of his contemporary society -- as we said earlier, into the manifested world such as Aristotle presented in his *Parts of Animals*. He is fixed on male beauty partly because physical union with it in a visceral context is taboo. This problem is indeed foreshadowed in his earlier refusal to show his portrait of Dorian to an all-too-curious public and to hold his heart "under their microscope" (15). His protégé also hints at his former master's tragic flaw when he sizes him up alongside Sir Harry Wotton: "I know you are better than he is. You are not stronger -- you are too afraid of life -- but you are better" (87). Indeed, unlike Wotton and Dorian, Basil has no romances, no loves, no intimate relationships at all. When he dies, his absence is noted by his many friends but not grieved. His associations with the natural, with the web of life, and with vitality itself are in the context of art, not experience. In this way, his tragic story sheds light on the earlier passage from *Parts of Animals*, particularly the idea and nuances which Thompson missed. Aristotle has much to say on behalf of things celestial, which give us "more pleasure than all our knowledge of the world in which we live" (1004). Similarly, Hallward's apparently imperishable portrait of the beautiful young man is at one with the stars. His fixation on Dorian is akin to the contemplation of a Hellenic statue. Thus his gay passion stands protected in his portrait of it, and later when the physical painting itself begins to degenerate, his love finds its refuge in his own mind. Hallward's continual exclamations throughout the novel of "Don't talk like that," "don't speak," "Deny them, Dorian, deny them!" "I don't agree with a word you've said" and "I tell you the thing is impossible" seem to press against the very course of time itself. As Roland Barthes writes in his treatment of Racine's *Phaedra*, "Surrendered to the *logos*, time cannot be reversed, its creation is definitive. Thus by avoiding speech, one avoids action, shifting the responsibility for it to others" (120). The choice of silence and an impossible love is Hallward's own. Fearing the nearness that sex always brings, he en-

sconces his love in the vision on the canvas and gracefully and presumably thankfully quits the field when the figure of Sybil Vane comes along. In this sense, he is parallel to the aesthetic and quasi-religious Miriam Leivers who, in *Sons and Lovers*, is "always most interested in him [Paul, her prospective lover] as he appeared in his work" (459), which is also art. For both characters lack of consummation and communication with the beloved is essential.

In addition to shedding light on Basil's central reticence, the picture of Dorian Gray stands symbolically for the way gay love, if it is brought into the experiential sphere of the present day, will become corrupted over time, while Hallward's original painting and Hallward himself stand for the pure love that other artists envisioned but that the modern milieu prevents from becoming real. As Ed Cohen writes, "Basil's portrait of Dorian can embody his desire for the eponymous character, and yet a male homoerotic passion remains, in the dominant representational codes of the period, *peccatum illud horribile non nominandum inter christianos* -- or, in a bad paraphrase of Lord Alfred Douglas, a love whose name the text dare not speak" (811). Hallward reveals much about this tragic condition, as well as his own defect of fear, during his second confession, this time in Chapter Nine in the aftermath of his confrontation of Dorian over his callous response to Sybil's suicide:

I had drawn you as Paris in dainty armour and as Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished boar-spear. Drowned with heavy lotus-blossoms you had sat on the prow of Adrian's barge, gazing across the green turbid Nile. You had leant over the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in water's silent silver the marvel of your own face. And it had all been what art should be, unconscious, ideal, and remote. One day, a fatal day I sometimes think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and in your own time. Whether it was the Realism of the method or the mere wonder of your personality, thus directly presented to me without mist of veil, I cannot tell. But I know that as I worked at it, every flake and film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much, that I had put too much of myself into it. (90)

While the gay sexual ideal might be acceptable in the garb of the distant past, making it contemporary brings on a disturbance. In *The Moral Vision of Oscar Wilde*, Philip K. Cohen writes that "In the preliminary portraits, Basil could vicariously multiply his personality, could imaginatively assume and configure a number of identities without losing his own. But then he cast aside the veil to find in life, and to render in its own terms, the ideal he had previously imposed upon it. The barrier having fallen, he surrendered that control which, according to 'The Critic [As Artist],' shields one from life's agonies" (132). Hallward is brought to "the verge of a terrible crisis in my life" (11) because Antinous has stepped out of ancient Rome and come into the immediacy of the painter's own studio. In this sense, the bedroom is not far off. The historical progression leading up to all this actually traces the slow process of Hallward coming out to himself and then taking flight, in a continuation of what Nunokawa noted earlier with regard to the first confession. The gallery of luminary figures is paralleled, later, by the historical parade which Dorian uses to inspire and justify his own sexual excesses described in Chapter Eleven. Both men are pressed by a vision of the past to take action. Both ultimately turn to the closet, Hallward pursuing an extension of his monkish life in art, and Dorian moving on to become the ultimately secretly gay Narcissus, who acts out his own inner hatred by destroying the lives and loves of both men and women alike. In this sense, Hallward's undisclosed truth about himself is not far from Dorian's about the portrait. Both buried secrets are studies in internalized homophobia.

As the central figure of this ongoing tragedy, Hallward has been eliciting pity and terror from the audience as the disappointed lover who keeps trying to save a lost one-time paramour of the mind who has become at first indifferent and then finally murderous. In the second confession in the 1890 version, Hallward articulates the heartrending, "I quite admit that I adored you madly, extravagantly, absurdly. I was jealous of every one to whom you spoke, I wanted you all to myself" (232). When this utterance is combined with his admission that "I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man usually gives to a friend. Somehow, I had never loved a woman" (232), Hallward joins with the tragic figures of Juliet, Cleopatra, and even Othello, who staked everything on one impossible love. Unlike them, however, Hallward never enjoys the fulfillment of desire, and the futility of his quest is embodied in the murdering hand of his own beloved. In the third confession scene of Chapter Twelve, which precedes his death, Hallward admits to himself that the object of his idolatry is no long-



er pure, and therefore his own gay self is stifled. Cropping up in Dorian's life again, he says that he is on his way to Paris to finish "a great picture I have in my head" (115). It is possible, of course, that he is on his way to paint yet another modern-day Antinous to replace the old one who died of degeneracy and a murdered reputation. If so, the assassination of gay potential is accented twice when Dorian kills him, for in doing so, Dorian destroys both the love of his idolater and the new portrait still forming in his victim's mind. In this context, Dorian's act is also one of internalized homophobia; he kills Hallward because he hates the male love that would seek him out and speak its name. In the last chapter of the novel, Dorian reflects, "Basil had said things to him that were unbearable, and that he had yet borne with patience" (168). Loss of patience issuing into murder is what Hallward ultimately receives. Dorian becomes his nemesis, because Hallward directed what was beautiful -- both in his life and art -- upon a corrupted object.

The "too late" of tragedy applies to Hallward not in the sense that he was too wayward, as it is in the case of King Lear or Othello, but in the sense that he was too abstaining, which would be true in the story of Hamlet. Had he thrust himself into the life of Dorian, made him a romantic offer, he would have discovered him to be the man he truly was. What Hallward has been witnessing has been the rather unusual tragic instance of a bad man coming to a bad end -- a story which, in fact, Aristotle dismisses from his definition, because "such a course of events may arouse in us some measure of human sympathy, but not the emotions of pity and fear" (Cooper 39). Thinking he is in love with Romeo, Hallward cannot thrust his life far enough into Dorian's to recognize the man is actually Richard III or Macbeth. In tracking the path of this last character, R.S. Crane has noted that the archetypal hero's "change is not merely from good to bad fortune, but from a good state of character to a state in which the hero is almost, but not quite, transformed into a monster; and the tragic act which initiates the change, and still more the subsequent unjust acts which this entails, are acts done ... in full knowledge of their character" (71). Thus Hallward's undeserved misfortune springs from his character flaws of both waywardness (his admiring forwardness in relation to his beloved) and his visceral squeamishness. Aesthetics puts him into the danger zone of Dorian's rage but not far enough to allow himself to come to a realization and seek refuge. He is killed while he is still in the midst of his denial.

The catharsis of pity and fear with regard to Hallward arrives when Dorian turns into his own Nemesis and stabs the painting in a final act of internalized homophobia. But quite beyond Dorian's intentions, poetic justice manifests itself when the result is the slaying of corruption and the resurrection of beauty and therefore of gay desire. "They found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty" (170). Although Richard Dellamora insists that the remaining portrait "masks a continuing homophobia in the rhetoric of high culture" (84), Hallward emerges again as the envisioner of that depicted youth and perfection, and so his manifestation of homoerotic love stands vindicated at the end, even while the accent must also fall upon his tragic inability to experience it carnally in his own life, or transcend his own worship of external beauty. Writing at length on Aristotelian catharsis in "The Critic as Artist," Wilde, in the form of Gilbert, poses this vision of the conclusion of a tragedy:

concerning himself primarily with the impression that the work of art produces, Aristotle sets himself to analyze that impression, to investigate its source, to see how it is engendered. As a physiologist and psychologist, he knows that the health of a function resides in energy. To have a capacity for passion and not to realize it, is to make oneself incomplete and limited. The mimic spectacle of life that tragedy affords cleanses the bosom of much "perilous stuff," and by presenting high and worthy objects for the exercise of the emotions, purifies and spiritualizes the man; nay, not merely does it spiritualize him, but it initiates him also into noble feelings of which he might else have known nothing, the word *káθαρσις* [catharsis] having, it has sometimes seemed to me, a definite allusion to the rite initiation. (67)

Hallward was wayward in his confessions of love, bold in his portraitizing, and yet lacking in the ultimate execution of his love. In this sense, he represents the phrase, "to have a capacity for passion and not to realize it." His valorization and spiritualization are found, however, in his discovery of areas of himself he had not known before, and that very act makes him at one with Montaigne, Michelangelo, Winckelmann, and Shakespeare. The restored portrait serves as a commemorative of that initiation as well as a tragic reminder of his ultimate deficiency as a full agent of his own adventurous potential.

Surely the parallels to Wilde's own life are resonant everywhere in Hallward's Aristotelian tragedy. Of course there is the image of Lord Alfred Douglas as *l'homme fatal* or even nemesis, bringing down Wilde just when he was at the height of his literary acclaim and accomplishment. But we can also see in Wilde the initially starry-eyed artist who ultimately censored his own feelings and his own labors. When, during the First Trial, Wilde denied to Carson that the 1890 version of the novel was "purged" (Lawler in Wilde, *The Picture* 357), we can hear the prevaricating Hallward of the opening chapter extolling a passion which he, Phaedra-like, hopelessly plans to bury. Indeed there is no denying that like the painter himself, Wilde began to hide away from the world the very sort of homoeroticism he sought to share with it. The sentences of unabashedly gay adoration which characterize Hallward in his second confession are all deleted, giving Carson, ironically, a certain advantage in reading them aloud to the jury: "Do you mean to say," Carson then asked, "that that passage describes the natural feeling of one man towards another?" (Lawler in Wilde, *The Picture* 358). And when Carson followed up with "Then you have never known the feeling you described?" Wilde answered with "No. It is a work of fiction" (Lawler in Wilde, *The Picture* 358), a reply consistent with Hallward's pursuit of gay love only via paint and canvas. The irony is, that while Hallward in the original edition is most affirmative in his expression of homosexual passion, he becomes equivocal and more secretive at the hands of his doubting creator, not only in the book edition of a year later but even in Wilde's refutation, in the *St James Gazette*, of his homophobic detractors: "worshipping physical beauty far too much, as most painters do, [Hallward] dies by the hand of one in whose soul he has created a monstrous and absurd vanity" (Lawler in Wilde, *The Picture* 339), a charge that later critics such as Meyers and Liebman have taken to be true.

At the opening of the novel, Hallward advances the idea of a whole new way of painting, with Dorian's figure suggesting "an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style" (14). A portrait of unapologetic, self-affirming gay love would indeed affirm "the harmony of the soul and body" and "all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek" (14). For a moment, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* holds out the hope it, too, will be in the "entirely new mode of style," before it too turns the story to tragedy in Hallward's case and ruin in Dorian's. In speaking initially of his discovery, Hallward articulates the gay man's hunger for the positive image of the love he feels within, both physical and spiritual. As Ed Cohen writes, "In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde problematizes representation per se to move athwart the historical limitations that define male homosexuality as 'unnameable,' thereby creating one of the most lasting icons of male homoerotic desire" (811). But by examining the manuscript and the original version of the novel, we can see that not even the flamboyant Wilde himself could withstand the pressures that Hallward himself feels, and thus "I found myself face to face with the young man whose beauty had so stirred me" (178) is changed to "face to face with the young man whose personality had so strangely stirred me (12, 178 in the 1890 and 1891 versions), and "adored you madly, extravagantly, absurdly" (232 in the 1890 version) is deleted entirely, making way for the long cortege of historical and mythological personages, from Paris to Antinous, who, not present in the *Lippincott* edition, trace out the shy and arduous process of a Hallward coming out to himself.

Wilde's personal life also parallels, even beyond these literary endeavors, these thwarted attempts. His flouting of Victorian morals and hypocrisy by entering the street in the company of Lord Alfred Douglas -- even his taking Queensbury to trial and creating an initial judicial comedy which would ultimately result in his celebrated defense of "the love that dare not speak its name" -- suggests a strongly energetic gay icon for self-affirmation. However, his plummet into penury, imprisonment, and isolation ultimately creates a ruin far more heartbreaking than Dorian's murder of himself and the lovely and idealistic Hallward. The catharsis of the enormous pity and fear elicited by Wilde's extraordinary life and genius must be left to the biographers, who, like Hallward, must celebrate once again the power of the initially beautiful painting and finish the formation of the icon. In *Oscar Wilde of the Thames and Hudson Literary Lives* sequence, Wilde's own son Vyvyan Holland concludes, "the tragedy of Oscar Wilde ranks with most other great historical tragedies, which are mainly brought about by the stupidity of pompous and self important people" (126), while earlier in his own autobiography, *Son of Oscar Wilde*, he writes: "The worst aspects of Victorian hypocrisy have now disappeared, and today my father would not have been hounded to his death as he was fifty years ago. The self-righteousness of that age was really camouflage to disguise its own hypocrisy, and the people who were loudest in their condemnation of my father were often those whose own lives could least



bear investigation. Nothing makes the transgressor so indignant as the transgressions, of a different kind, of his fellow-men; except, perhaps transgressions of the same kind" (203).

It is to the next generation after our own that the unfinished task of "an entirely new manner of art" is left, one which transcends suppression and celebrates the soul and body of the gay man and the love he bears his peers. One can see the ongoing work in writers, painters, and filmmakers who will follow not only Vyvyan Wilde but Wilde's grandson, Merlin Holland, as well (see Biography Channel's DVD *Oscar Wilde*) and their compassionate examples. From the novel *Women in Love* through to the film *Leaving Metropolis* and the epic play *Angels in America*, the struggle for manifesting the affirming gay icon continues: it is the embrace of Hallward's "harmony and soul" that is still hungered for in those of us sympathetic to Wilde, tragedian and painter of innermost lives.

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